

Islam in Indonesia

ISLAM IN INDONESIA

Contrasting Images and Interpretations

Edited by
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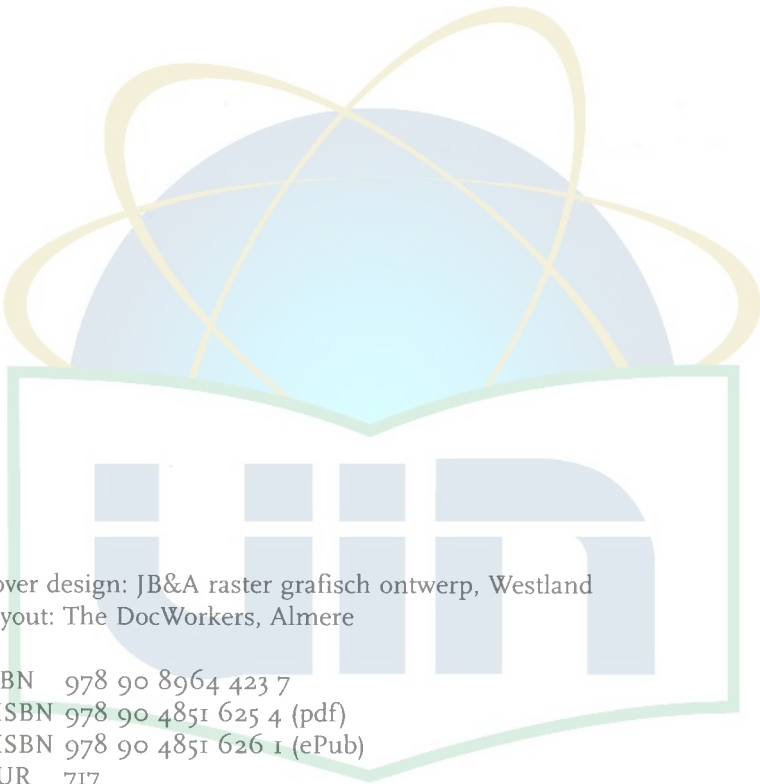
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Introduction

In recent years, the way Islam manifests itself in Indonesia has changed. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, there is stricter adherence to Islam, and fundamentalism has gained strength. An increasing number of Indonesian Muslims are observing the tenets of their religion more faithfully. More people fulfil the *hajj*, one of the basic pillars of Islam, and an increasing number of women wear a headscarf, sometimes a very fashionable one. These women include members of a segment of society that used to be considered the embodiment of secularism and syncretism, known in Indonesia as the *abangan*.

National surveys confirm this trend. In the last ten years or so, Muslims in Indonesia have become more religious in their attitudes and practices. The use of rituals associated with *abangan* culture has decreased, to be replaced by those of more observant Muslims, the *santri*. As a result, Islamic symbols and elements can be seen everywhere in Indonesian public life, including in liberal and capitalist institutions such as company offices and shopping malls.

The increasing emphasis on Islam is also reflected in the shifting position of fundamentalist groups. Since Suharto was forced to step down in the late 1990s, Indonesia has witnessed a growing religious militancy. Not only have the militants increased in number, but they are also more actively engaged in missionary activities among fellow Muslims. Various radical organisations have emerged, including the FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Front of the Defenders of Islam), the MMI (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, Indonesian Council of Jihad Fighters) and the Laskar Jihad (Jihad Force). With a militant agenda of purifying Islam, these organisations are engaged in a series of violent acts against others, creating concern among moderate Muslims, who still form a majority in Indonesia. Their aspiration is to implement Islamic law in the public sphere, which in Indonesia is supposed to be religiously neutral.

The aims of these radical Muslim organisations are congruent with those of a number of Islamic political parties in parliament, while in some regions local administrations are trying to enforce proper Islamic conduct. The *fatwa*-giving commission of the MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Council of Indonesian Religious Scholars) – the institution en-

trusted by the government with this task – and its regional chapters, at times also acts as the guardian of a strict interpretation of Islam.

Contributing to this trend has been the changing relationship between the state and Islam since around the turn of the century. After Indonesia became independent on 17 August 1945, its history as a nation is usually divided into three parts: the Old Order when Sukarno was President, the New Order when Suharto was in power, and the post-1998 period. The Sukarno years were coloured by antagonism between adherents of a religiously neutral state – or the Pancasila state, named after the five principles formulated by Sukarno in 1945 as the ideological foundation of political life – and the proponents of an Islamic state. A number of these proponents took up arms, fighting for an Islamic State of Indonesia (also known as the Darul Islam rebellion); others tried to realise their ideals through constitutional means by striving for a majority in the representative bodies. In the Constituent Assembly, the political institution tasked with defining the nature of the Indonesian state, those in favour of giving the Indonesian state an Islamic base and those against were more or less in balance. The deadlock this caused induced Sukarno to re-introduce the Constitution promulgated in 1945, which mentions Pancasila in its preamble, on 5 July 1959.

The period that followed was one of intense indoctrination of the Pancasila state ideology and increased domestic tension and repression. Deeply religious Muslims and the organisations that represented them were among those who suffered. Hard hit was Masjumi, the political party of the adherents of Islamic modernism, a stream of thinking that had reached Indonesia around the turn of the twentieth century and that had spread gradually and steadily. The government accused Masjumi leaders of siding with the Darul Islam and a second rebellion that took place in Sumatra and had regional rather than religious sentiments as its roots. Consequently, Masjumi was banned in 1960. The large modernist socio-religious organisation, Muhammadiyah, was allowed to continue to exist, as was its traditionalist counterpart, the Nahdlatul Ulama; but it became impossible for the leaders of either organisation to publicly criticise government policy in any field.

Suharto's New Order brought some relief, but only partially so. The generals who came to power in 1965 were highly suspicious of political Islam and the Masjumi. The authorities introduced a new term – right extremism – for political Islam and for demands for a state based on *syariah* instead of Pancasila. Only those fundamentalist groups that kept clear of politics and did not question Pancasila as the basis of the state were tolerated. Speaking out against the national ideology meant imprisonment or life in exile, if not worse. Masjumi remained a forbidden party. Banned from politics, as a number of the contributions to

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